

JOHN FIELD  
OF DUBLIN

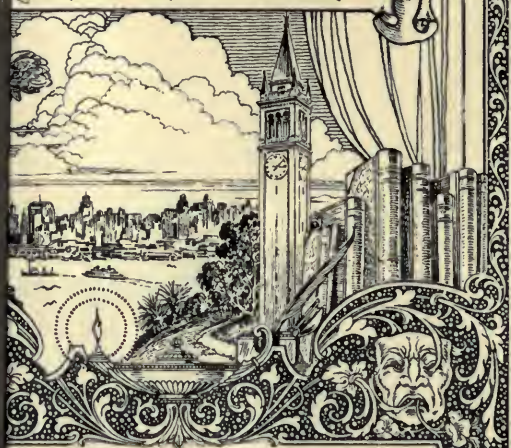
Inventor of the Nocturne



W. H. GRATTAN FLOOD, Mus. D.

101  
26372  
046  
1921 f

LIBRIS UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



IN HENRY NASH LIBRARY

◆ SAN FRANCISCO ◆

PRESENTED TO THE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

ERT GORDON SPROUL, PRESIDENT.

◆ BY ◆

MR. AND MRS. MILTON S. RAY

LY, VIRGINIA AND ROSALYN RAY

AND THE

RAY OIL BURNER COMPANY

SAN FRANCISCO

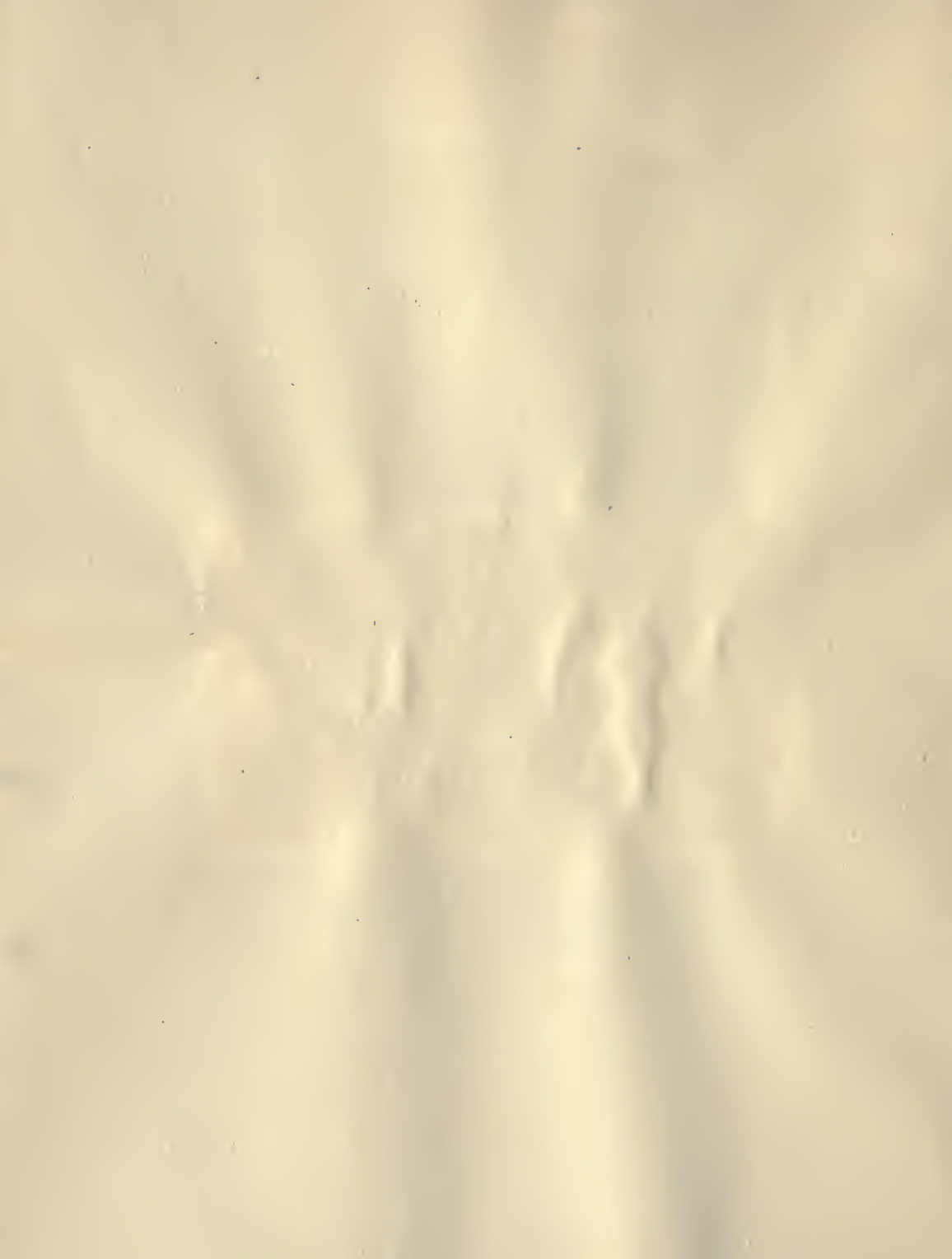
NEW YORK

21  
5  
7

JOHN FIELD OF DUBLIN

*The Bancroft Library*

University of California • Berkeley







JOHN FIELD.

*From a Steel Engraving in the Author's possession.*

JOHN FIELD OF DUBLIN  
INVENTOR OF THE NOCTURNE

A BRIEF MEMOIR WRITTEN BY  
W. H. GRATTAN FLOOD, MUS. D.

author of : A History of Irish Music ;  
The Story of the Harp ; The  
Story of the Bagpipe, etc., etc.



DUBLIN : MARTIN LESTER, LIMITED  
87 HARCOURT STREET.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.archive.org/details/johnfieldofdubli00floorich>



*Dedicated to my friend,*  
*REV. GEORGE O'NEILL, S.J., M.A.*





## P R E F A C E

**I**RISHMEN have been frequently taunted with being *incuriosi suorum*, and, in the case of John Field of Dublin, the taunt is not unmerited. Eighty-three years have passed since this wonderful composer, pianist, and inventor was laid at rest in Moscow and yet he has not found an Irish biographer. Had he been an Englishman he would certainly have had his biography published, but being a "mere Irishman" his merits have been relegated to brief and inadequate notices in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and in the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Yet, there are monographs on Field in French, Italian, German, Flemish, Danish, and Russian, all of which, however, give the credit of his training to Clementi, whereas he had been known as a musical prodigy in Dublin, and had made several public appearances at the Rotunda before going to London.

As recently as 1911 a German memoir of Field was presented as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Leipzig by Heinrich Dessauer, and was published at Langensalza in 1912. By contrast, one solitary line is devoted to him in Stanford and Forsyth's *History of Music* (1916), and that solitary line in reference to "Russian" music. Here is the precious gem: "Glinka was a pupil of the *Englishman* Field, an enthusiastic patriot, and an untiring student of Russian folk-music!"

Recent writers have endeavoured to claim Chopin as the inventor of the Nocturne, and the originator of the *genre* in the matter of the extended accompaniment of scattered chords and graceful embellishments of melody, with wonderful arpeggio and pedal effects; but it is admitted by all the French and German critics that the Nocturne, and the well-known developments in pianoforte playing, were due to Field of Dublin. Here it is sufficient to state that Field's first three Nocturnes were published in the early autumn of 1814, when Chopin was but four years old!

For many facts in relation to the early career of Field I am indebted to my old friend, Mr. W. J. Lawrence (the Shakespearian scholar), while for much matter concerning his concerts

in Paris I owe my best acknowledgments to the late Michel Brenet, one of the most brilliant of French musicologists. The writings of Schumann, Spohr, Fétis, Liszt, Parent, and d'Ortigue supply ample notes for a biography of Field, and this material I have endeavoured to compress as much as possible in the following pages.

W. H. GRATTAN FLOOD

ENNISCORTHY

*Michaelmas, 1920*







## JOHN FIELD OF DUBLIN

**J**OHN FIELD was ushered into the world in the modest residence of the Field family in Golden Lane, Dublin, on July 26th, 1782, For two or three generations the Fields had been professional musicians, the father being a member of the Theatre Royal Orchestra, Crow Street, and the grandfather an organist of one of the city churches. The child was christened at St. Werburgh's Church on September 30th following, and was given the name of John in compliment to his grandfather. His father's name was Robert, a name which was also borne by his great-grandfather.

Here let me mention that though Golden Lane was not an aristocratic locality, 'it could boast of a goodly number of lawyers, doctors, and musicians—and it is of interest to note that it can claim the honour of being associated with Daniel Roseingrave, who died there in 1727, and of Mrs. Jameson, who was born at No. 36



Golden Lane in 1794. The father and grandfather lived in the one house, which was utilised as a musical academy, the former being a successful professor of the violin, and the latter an equally successful teacher of the pianoforte and organ.

As early as his seventh year young John Field evinced a taste for the pianoforte, an instrument which had then practically superseded the harpsichord, and the grandfather took charge of his teaching, while the father looked after his practice. Neither the father nor the grandfather spared the rod in order to stimulate the musical proclivities of the youth, and both of them rigidly adopted the Solomon-like precedent in regard to his musical training. He himself confided to Fétis, in after years, that the thrashings he had received from his father and grandfather drove him from the parental roof. This episode has been distorted by some writers, who embroider it by adding that: "starvation drove him back both to home and practice, with the result that at twelve years of age he made his first appearance in London." It would actually appear that the severe treatment accorded to John Field as a youth of eight was not a whit more harsh than the experience of choir boys in the 18th century. Certain it is



(and the fact has not been alluded to by previous writers) that in the spring of the year 1791 the precocious boy was sent to the famous Tommaso Giordani for "finishing lessons" on the piano.

At nine years of age Field displayed an unwonted virtuosity on the piano, and Giordani prevailed on his father and grandfather to allow the Dublin public to have an opportunity of hearing the youthful prodigy at a Rotunda Concert. Accordingly, with the glad consent of the Field household, Giordani billed Master Field as an attraction at the series of three "Spiritual Concerts" which he gave at the Rotunda during the Lenten season of 1792.

Field's debut\* took place in his native city on Saturday, March 24th, 1792, and Giordani was fortunate in also securing the appearance of Madame Gautherot, the famous lady violinist. It is gratifying to chronicle that the Dublin public gave generous proof of their recognition of native talent, and, in consequence, the advertisement of the second concert on the 4th of April informed the public that "*the much-admired Master Field, a youth of eight years of age, would*

\* It may be well to mention that Master Field had appeared as one of the "musical children" at Master Tom Cooke's benefit Concert at the Exhibition Rooms, William Street, on February 14, 1792

*perform on the Piano Forte a new Concerto composed by Signor Giordani.*" Master Field again appeared at the third concert on April 14th, and his playing elicited the warmest encomiums. It will be noted that Master Field was advertised at these concerts as "a youth of eight years of age," but this "pious fraud" (not yet unknown to advertisers) was doubtless excusable, as, though the youth was in reality close on ten, he looked scarcely eight.

Nor was Field's genius confined to piano virtuosity in 1792 and 1793. In the latter year he blossomed forth as a composer, and published an arrangement (with variations) of the old Irish air: *Go to the Devil and shake yourself*. He also composed two pianoforte rondos on his master's songs: *Since then I'm doomed* and *Slave, bear the sparkling goblet round*—both of which were much admired in 1792-3. These trifles were followed by *Signora del Caro's Hornpipe, with Variations*—and all four were re-published by Longman and Broderick in 1795, and by Clementi and Co. in 1801.

In the summer of the year 1793 Venanzio Rauzzini, the noted singer and composer, who was Director of the Bath Concerts, invited Field's father to become leader of the orchestral concerts at that fashionable resort, and so Mas-

ter Field bade good-bye to Dublin. Less than six months later Robert Field was offered a more tempting engagement in London as one of the violins at the Haymarket Theatre. Accordingly, the Field household was transferred to the English metropolis in December 1793.

How different is this plain unvarnished tale of young Field's nascent powers from the generally accepted story! I have dwelt at rather undue length on the events of the years 1791-1793; because previous authorities have not scrupled to write that Field "was driven by starvation to return to his home, with the result that at twelve years of age he made his first appearance in London." As has been stated, Field's early musical training was looked after by his grand- and father and was developed by Tommaso Giordani.

No sooner had Field's father settled in London than he apprenticed his son to Muzio Clementi, who at once recognised the genius of the boy. The fact of his father giving a fee of one hundred guineas to Clementi for the apprenticeship of his son is a distinct proof that Field *père* was anxious to give the boy the benefit of the best piano master in London, and such a large sum must have entailed no small sacrifice upon the struggling violinist.

As early as April, 1794, Clementi announced the young Irish lad as his pupil, and a month later "Master Field, aged ten," performed one of Clementi's Sonatas at Barthelemon's Concert. Haydn, Dussek, and Cramer predicted great things for the young Dublin pianist, but Clementi mainly used him as a hack, for showing off his pianos, and kept the boy at this dreadful drudgery for five years. One can well sympathise with Master Field during these years, 1794 - 1799, compelled to strum away daily for the delectation of would-be purchasers of Clementi's pianofortes. However, Clementi was very proud of his pupil, who not only practised the piano assiduously, but also studied the violin with G. H. Pinto—a fact which is emphasised by Pinto's dedication of a Piano-forte Sonata "to my friend John Field," published by Robert Birchall in 1800.

On February 7th, 1799, Pinto had a benefit performance at the Haymarket Theatre, and the chief attraction was Master Field, who was announced to play his own "Concerto for the grand forte piano, composed for the occasion." The *Morning Chronicle* (Feb. 9, 1799) gives the following notice of this concert :—

"The chief source of admiration in the course of the evening was a Concerto on the grand

piano forte by Master Field, a pupil of Clementi's. This young gentleman, though only fifteen years of age, has been esteemed by the best judges *one of the finest performers in this kingdom*, and his astonishing display of ability on this occasion proved how justly he was entitled to the distinction. The Concerto was, we understand, wholly of his own composition, and one more calculated to display rapidity of execution, attended with characteristic musical expression, we never heard."

Two years later, on February 20, 1801, Field, now described as "the late pupil of Clementi," played between the "Acts" of Mozart's *Requiem* and Handel's *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso* at the Oratorio Concerts at Covent Garden Theatre, and created quite a furore by the performance of his own Concerto, as is stated in the following day's issue of the *Morning Post*. He also played the Rondo on *Since then I'm doomed*, which had been so popular in Dublin.

Messrs. Clementi and Co. wrote to Pleyel of Paris on December 9, 1801, apprising that firm of many new musical works ready for publication, including "some very valuable scores of Clementi, Dussek, Viotti, and Cramer." But of particular interest, it is added, there are some



new compositions by Field, "a pupil of M. Clementi, *a very promising genius, and already become a great favourite in this country both in respect to composition and performance: it is likely you will soon see him in Paris.*"

Clementi fully appreciated the genius of Field, but instead of exploiting him as a virtuoso, he had in view an extended European tour, with Field as salesman for the Clementi pianofortes. Meantime, he published four or five pieces by Field, including the three Sonatas in A, E flat, and C minor (dedicated to Clementi), but the rush of business delayed his visit to Paris. At length, in the early part of August, 1802, the two pianists set forth for the French capital, where Field's playing of Bach's Fugues, and of pieces by Handel and Clementi, took Paris by storm. At Vienna Field scored a similar triumph. Towards the close of the year 1802 Clementi and Field arrived in St. Petersburg, where the former with true commercial instinct opened a showroom for the sale of his firm's pianos, retaining Field to display the instruments to the best advantage. Under date of December 22, 1802, Spohr, in his remarkable autobiography, describes his visit to the music showrooms. He waxes most enthusiastic over the superb playing of the young Irishman. Poor Field—

at that date twenty years of age and still in an Eton suit which he had much outgrown—a pale, shy individual, unacquainted with any language save English; and yet, as Spohr assures us, the moment that he started to play the piano, “all his *gaucheries* were ignored and the real artist displayed.”

When Clementi left St. Petersburg in the early summer of the year 1803, he left Field behind him as the guest of General Merkloffski; and the young Irishman soon formed a large and aristocratic *clientèle*, being also in much request for concerts. When Clementi returned to Russia in 1804 he found that his former pupil was on the ladder of success. Evidently about this time Clementi sold a grand piano to Field in exchange for certain musical compositions, as appears from a letter written by the former to his partner Collard, dated Vienna, April 22nd, 1807:—“Has Field sent you the Concerto, the Quintet, and something more, as I had agreed with him for his grand piano? If not, pray write by Faveryear to him.”

From 1804 to 1807 Field's services both as virtuoso and teacher were in much request; and he gave numerous concerts which proved highly remunerative. He soon acquired a mastery of French, German, and Russian, and was

in high favour in the most select circles. He got petted so much that he became indolent and frivolous, added to which he was very absent-minded and eccentric. Like so many other artists he was improvident and lived like a true Bohemian, leading a life diversified with various love affairs. To complicate matters he became infatuated with a young French actress, whom he married early in 1808.

It has been stated by more than one writer that Field married "a Mademoiselle Charpentier," and that "they were separated within a year." Neither statement is true. The name of the actress whom Field wedded was Mademoiselle Percherou, and the marriage ceremony was performed by a parson called Syuruk. As a matter of fact the ill-assorted pair lived together for five years, for we find them both taking part in a concert at Moscow on Sunday, March 10, 1812, for the benefit of the orchestra of the Imperial Theatre. Four days later Field and his wife gave a grand concert at the residence of Princess Trubitzky "opposite the Evangelical Church."

While in Moscow he gave lessons to Charles Mayer, who was ever afterwards an ardent champion of his Irish master. At this time, also, Field became very friendly with Steibelt, one



of the great musical stars in Moscow. Another friend was Dr. Quinlan, of Templeorum, Co. Kilkenny, who was Head Physician for 35 years to the Royal Hospital at Moscow, where he died on July 19, 1827.

The year 1812 is memorable for the composition of a *Grand Marche Triomphale "en honneur des victoires du General Comtede Witgenstein,"* quickly followed by a *Premier Divertissement an Air Russe Varié* (duet), and a *Fantasia*.

In the autumn of the year 1814 Field composed the first three Nocturnes, and a Pianoforte Sonata, as well as some Concertos—all of which were published at St. Petersburg in November. A month later appeared an extremely popular trifle, *Rondo Ecossais*, issued by Peters, founded on an Irish air, or more correctly an air composed by an Irishman. Strangely enough this air, *Speed the Plough*, is called *Air Ecossais* from its supposed *Scotch* origin, but it was undoubtedly composed by John Moorehead, an Irish violinist, as a dance in the *Naval Pillar*—a musical piece produced at Covent Garden Theatre on October 7, 1793. This dance tune became all the rage and was again introduced into Morton's comedy of *Speed the Plough*, performed at Covent Garden on February 8, 1800. Moorehead's aria was the tit-bit of this latter

musical piece (which gave its name to the dance tune)—a comedy memorable for the fictitious character of Mrs. Grundy.

Between the years 1815 and 1819 Field gave numerous concerts in St. Petersburg, and his reputation as a piano teacher was rapidly growing. His best-known pupil at this period was the famous Michael Ivanovich Glinka, the founder of Russian National Opera and of the Russian School of Music. Glinka subsequently wrote of his Irish master: "Field's playing was at once sweet and strong and characterised by admirable precision. His fingers fell on the keys as large drops of rain that spread themselves like iridescent pearls. Here let me say—and I am sure that my opinion is shared by many who have heard Field—that I do not share the view of Liszt who told me on one occasion that he found Field's playing "sleepy." No! the playing of Field was not sleepy, on the contrary it was strong, capricious, and improvised. In particular, he never descended to charlatanism to produce his effects."\*

In 1817 Field composed his charming Concerto No. 5, known as *L'incendie par l'orage*, with accompaniment for full orchestra, dedicated to

\* *Glinka d'après ses memoires*—by Oct. Fouque (1880).

Her Excellency Madame de Rosenkampf, and published by Breitkopf and Hartel. This great work was soon heard all over Europe, but the first performance of it in England was not until 1821, when it was played by Mr. Charles Hargitt as *The Storm Concerto* at Hanover Square Rooms, London. The same year (1817) was memorable for his Nocturnes No. 4 and No. 5 (in A and B flat). The Nocturne in A is one of the most exquisite pieces of its kind ever composed. Dr. Ernest Walker in his *History of Music in England* (1907) pronounces it as not only "a most beautiful thing," but he styles it "Field's masterpiece." Yet, in 1820, Field's Nocturnes had not got a hearing in England, nor yet in Ireland! These two Nocturnes were followed by four Concertos, a Quintet, two Divertissements, a Polonaise, a Grand Valse (duet), an Air Russe, and several exercises. Field did not lose sight of his old master, Clementi, and in 1822 he published, through the firm of Clementi, Collard and Collard, a Vocal Duet, *The Maid of Valdarno*, words by Mr. W. F. Collard. In the published score he is described as "John Field of Petersburg." In the same year appeared his Nocturne No. 6, in F, followed by his Nocturne No. 7, in C, in 1823. Of the latter Nocturne, No. 7, Schumann

wrote in terms of the highest eulogy, almost bordering on extravagance (*Neue Zeitschrift*). A year later (1824) he issued his Polonaise in the *Harmonicon*; and let it be borne in mind that Chopin had not at this date entered the Lyceum, nor had he published anything—his Op. 1 not appearing till 1825.

Early in 1822 Field settled in Moscow and became very friendly with Hummel. He realised large sums by his concerts, and had a most extensive teaching connection. Among his pupils were: Werstowsky, Gurileff, Frackmann, Rheinhardt, de Kontski, and Madam Szymanowska, also the English pianist and composer, Charles Neate.

Between the years 1822 and 1828 Field's erratic nature led him into many excesses, and owing to his intemperate habits he drifted gradually into reckless Bohemianism, to the neglect of his professional engagements and the undermining of his health. His death was reported on two occasions, first in 1828 and secondly in 1831. On the latter occasion Field wrote to the press a characteristically Irish denial of the obituary notice (anticipating the "exaggeration" story of Mark Twain), whereupon the *Harmonicon* for June 1831 made the following graceful *amende* from its Moscow correspondent:—"The report

of the famous John Field's death at the beginning of the year is unfounded. This great virtuoso on the forte-piano still lives; and if his love of retirement can be conquered Europe need not renounce the expectation of being gratified by hearing him; but it is with difficulty he can resolve on any exhibition of his powers."

Towards the close of the year 1831 Field accepted the invitation of the Philharmonic Society of London to play at their Concert on February 27, 1832. His playing on that occasion elicited the warmest admiration, especially his rendering of his own Concerto in E flat. At the Hadyn Centenary on March 31st he played an Andante with Variations, his performance being highly praised by his critics, although Cramer and Moscheles also assisted.

Field's visit to London in 1832 was saddened by the death of his old friend Clementi, who passed away on March 18th, and who was accorded a public funeral at Westminster Abbey on March 29, Field being one of the chief mourners

On May 6, 1832, Field was one of the honoured guests at a reception given by Moscheles, and he had the pleasure of meeting Mendelssohn, who was charmed with the playing of the Irish virtuoso.



Numerous friends in Paris urged Field to give a series of recitals in the French capital, and accordingly he went thither. His reception in Paris in the winter of 1832-3 was even more brilliant than that in London, and the critics were unanimous in praising his technique and virtuosity—all the more remarkable as Chopin had been giving a series of concerts some months previously. As is well known Field did not think very highly of Chopin, whom he described as *un talent de chambre de malade*. This sharp criticism was even eclipsed by Berlioz's remarkable sneer: "*il se mourait toute sa vie*." And apropos of Berlioz, it is worth while mentioning that Field made the acquaintance at this period of Miss Smithson, the Irish actress, who subsequently (Oct. 3, 1833) became the wife of Berlioz.

The *salle* of the Conservatoire of Paris on the 25th of December, 1832, was crowded with a fashionable and critical audience to hear the Irish inventor of the Nocturne. Fetis, who was present, declared his playing simply astonishing: "Whoever has not heard this great pianist can form no idea of the marvellous mechanism of his fingers—mechanism such that the greatest difficulties seem to be the simplest things, and that his hands do not appear to move. He is

not less astonishing in the art of attack, and of producing an infinite variety of *nuances*, whether as regards breadth, sweetness, or accent. An enthusiasm impossible to describe, a veritable delirium was manifested by the vast audience who were present to hear his Concerto, full of charm, rendered with a perfection of finish, precision of neatness and expression, which would be impossible to surpass and which very few pianists could hope to equal. If I merely consulted my own taste I should say that the two Rondos and the delicious Andantes which preceded them were excellent morceaux, but, evidently, the public taste was more captivated by the more showy and less tranquil movements." Joseph d'Ortigue, in his *Balcon de l'Opera* (Paris, 1883), writes even more enthusiastically:—"At the Conservatoire Field was accompanied by a full orchestra. Even as Paganini, Field is not less remarkable by reason of his compositions as by his playing. It is thus a double study for the listeners.

"*As a pianist Field has no rival*, whether as regards *genre* or method. He has no adopted system and is of no school: neither the school of Dussek, nor of Clementi, nor of Steibelt: *Field is Field—a school of his own*. His is a native and original talent. His playing is a sheer delight

—exquisitely *spirituelle*, coupled with surprising aplomb and coquetry. He sits at the piano even as if at his own fireside, with no attitudinising. At first one imagines that his playing is a little ponderous, then gradually it becomes animated, delicate, and inconceivably neat, amid the most intricate mazes. In his case the style is the man. His music is the music of the fairies.”

Equally brilliant was the reception accorded to Field at the Pape Salon on June 20, and on February 3, 1833. Regarding these latter concerts Joseph d’Ortigue wrote a glowing account: “Never did the beautiful Salons of M. Pape present a more numerous and a more brilliant appearance than at Field’s second Concert. Field was ably assisted by Drouet and Baillot, but his own playing of the four items was delightful, although the impression it gave me was not comparable to that which I had experienced at the Conservatoire.”

In the Spring and Summer of 1833 Field astonished various European centres by his virtuosity, including Brussels, Toulouse, Marseilles and Lyons. At Brussels he was announced as “Chapel Master of the Emperor of Russia and celebrated Pianist.” His concert of February 18, as reported in *Le Belge* was a huge success, and he subsequently gave a more



select concert, which realised 1,200 francs. At Toulouse the amateurs and professionals thronged to the Athenæum, and were delighted with the Irish pianist. His selections included a Concerto, a Rondo, and a Polonaise, and he was given a triple recall. At Marseilles, in August, a similar triumph awaited him, and he was styled "the Racine of the Piano." His Lyons reception was even more cordial, and the audience did not know what to admire the most, that is to say whether his compositions or the playing of them was the more remarkable.

The *Journal de Genève*, of September 4, announced the arrival of Field in Switzerland in the most complimentary terms. His concert at Geneva on September 30, in the Salle de Casino, was most brilliant, and he had the assistance of Domange and Sabon, with M. Bloc as leader of the orchestra. His selections included his Concerto No. 6, Nocturne in A, Rondo, and Pastorale and Rondo (Midi), with a quartet accompaniment. By request he gave a repetition performance on October 14.

At Milan, in November and December, the leading Italian critics lauded Field as an incomparable genius. From Milan Field wrote to Breitkopf and Hartel, of Leipzig, on November 20, offering them his Concerto No. 7, on the

same terms as No. 6—an offer which was accepted.

Florence applauded Field, as also did the music-loving centres of Venice and Naples. However, the strain of over a year's tour proved too much for a neurotic man of 52, and he fell seriously ill at Naples in 1834.

This "blaze of triumph" (as Bunn would write), for over a year, as attested by the Continental press, gives the lie to the statements of English writers who have not scrupled to defame Field both as regards his brilliant powers as composer and pianist; and, as regards his character, the following excerpts from a popular English essayist will prove how history is written:—

"Field's genius was passing into night with no star to illumine it. The morning of deeper harmonic utterance, of technical wonders, was dawning. With all the beauty of his touch and elegance of execution, though his music came with his heart between his fingers, Field lacked spirit, energy, and vigour. He roused no depth of passion, swept his hearers with no force. Such a school was rising. New possibilities of technique were developing. Hummel, to all the grace, refinement, and pure taste of Field added firmness, strength, and speed. . . . So Field, driven before the wind, passed into Switzerland,

thence to Brussels, and in 1833 into Italy. But neither in Milan, Venice, or Naples could he recall the old spell. Curiosity was cold, applause unheard, and failure stood gaunt in his path. He sank under the bitterness. Crushed by disease and despair, the lonely man crept into a Neapolitan hospital, where he lay nearly a year unknown. Here, by merest chance, a Russian student discovered the old master."

As has been seen, it was a case of "roses all the way" from London to Naples, that is, from February, 1832, to May, 1834. Dannreuther tells us that not long after his arrival in Naples Field became seriously ill, and had to be operated on for fistula, a disease accelerated by growing habits of intemperance. He lay in hospital for nine months, and was reduced to a pitiable condition, but his sensitive nature was such that he refused to write to any of his friends in Moscow, to let them know of his serious condition. However, by a fortunate accident, in June, 1835, the timely arrival in Naples of the Rachmanoff family—Russian nobles—rescued Field from his sad state. A few weeks at the health-giving resort of Ischia had a good effect on the Irish composer, and thence by easy stages he journeyed on to Venice with the Rachmanoffs.

At Vienna Field was the guest of Karl Czerny, who taught Liszt, Madame Oury, Döhler, and other famous pianists. The congenial surroundings helped to light anew the old fires, and Field was induced to give three concerts at the Hof Theatre on August 8, 11, and 13, 1835, delighting fashionable audiences by his beautiful playing. As Dannreuther writes, his exquisite performances "elicited transports of admiration." Whilst in Vienna he composed a new Concerto and a new Nocturne, the latter being dated August 13.

Towards the close of August, Field returned to Moscow with the Rachmanoffs, and in November, 1836, he became very ill. His friends and old pupils did all they could to alleviate his distressed condition, but at Christmas it was evident that the end was at hand. Early in January it was suggested to the dying musician that he might wish to have spiritual consolation from a minister of religion, whereupon the following dialogue ensued :—"Are you a Catholic?—No! Are you a Protestant?—No! Are you a Calvinist?—Not that either, said Field; not a Calvinist but a Pianist."

So passed away John Field of Dublin, on the 11th of January, 1837. Four days later he was given a public funeral, and was buried in the

Wedensky-Kirchhof, Moscow. His immediate circle erected a fine monument to his memory, on which was engraved the following inscription :

JOHN FIELD,

BORN IN IRELAND IN 1782,

DIED IN MOSCOW IN 1837,

ERECTED TO HIS MEMORY

BY HIS GRATEFUL FRIENDS AND SCHOLARS.

So much for the biographical data of Field. It only remains to mention his works. But first of all, some reader may ask, did Field really invent the Nocturne? The answer is most decidedly in the affirmative. True it is that a number of musical historians, mainly English, have sought to credit its invention to Chopin, but this great Polish pianist and composer came long after Field, and merely developed this *genre*. M. Brenet of Paris thus writes : " In regard to the invention of the Nocturne it is a fact sufficiently well established. Field was the inventor." H. Parent, in his well-known work, says that " Field's great distinction in the musical world is to have created a *genre*—the little pieces to which he has given the name of Nocturnes." — (*Répertoire Encyclopédique du Pianiste*—Tom. 1, pp. 99). Again, Dannreuther, in the new edition of Grove's *Dictionary of Music*



*and Musicians* (1906), admits Field's claim :—  
"The form of Chopin's weird Nocturnes, the kind of emotion embodied therein, the type of melody and its graceful embellishments, the peculiar waving accompaniments in widespread chords, with their vaguely prolonged sound resting on the pedals—*all this and more we owe to Field.*" More recently still, Dr. Ernest Walker, in his *History of Music in England* (1907), acquiesces in the ascription to Field of the invention of the Nocturne. "These slender piano pieces are indeed curiously original for their date. It is easy to see their deep influence on the nocturnes of Chopin, as regards the types of melody, and also, especially, the methods of writing for the instrument. It is by a handful of the nocturnes that Field really lives . . . The best of these exquisitely polished little miniatures, with their delicate melodies and their shy, fugitive gracefulness, will long serve to keep his name fragrant. They and Wesley's motets—a curious conjunction—are by far the most artistically self-subsisting specimens of English music of the period." Comparing the work of Clementi, Cramer, Moscheles, and Czerny, as artistes, Dr. Walker concludes that "*we could give up all their studies for a single one of the best Nocturnes of Field.*"

But, more emphatic still is the verdict of Henry Davey, author of the *History of English Music*. (1895): "Here at last we meet with a musician who *invented*, who had a style of his own—a composer and performer of European celebrity. As a player, Field is reckoned among the very greatest that ever lived. He is said to have kept the fingers almost perpendicular, and his touch was distinguished by an unprecedented richness and *sostenuto* and by the subtlest details of expression. . . . He made an important addition to existing means of expression by his *new form of Nocturne* . . . and we owe it entirely to Field. Chopin, a man of far greater intellectual power, applied deeper science and richer poetry to the *Nocturne*; but he did not altogether eclipse Field, *the original inventor*."

Field's principal piano compositions are as follows:—Seven Concertos (No. 1, E flat; No. 2, A flat; No. 3, E flat; No. 4, E flat; No. 5, C ("The Storm" or "*L'incendie par l'orage*"); No. 6, C; No. 7, C Minor); two Divertisimenti, with orchestral accompaniments; a Quintet and a Rondo for piano and strings; 16 Nocturnes; Variations on a Russian Air for four hands; a Grand Valse for four hands; four Sonatas, three of which are dedicated to Clementi; two Airs en Rondeau; three Fantasias; Polonaise

Rondo; several Rondos, Russian Airs, Irish Airs, English Airs, Romances, and three Exercises; also two French Songs and an English Duet.

Of this output, his Concertos and Nocturnes will perpetuate his name. Not all his Concertos, indeed, but at least two. Nor yet all his Nocturnes, but probably six. Owing to the eccentricities of publishers the name of Nocturne has been applied to several pieces not intended as such by Field—and hence the usual publishers' lists contain variously 17, 18, and 20 Nocturnes. This number must be reduced to 16, and of these 16 there are five that stand out pre-eminently. These five are the Nocturnes given as Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 in Liszt's edition—an edition prefaced by a delightful appreciation of the great Irish inventor by one who was himself a pianist and composer of European fame. These five Nocturnes, "five delicate little lyrics," as Dannreuther writes, "are the very essence of all idylls and eclogues, 'Poésies intimes' of simple charm and inimitable grace, such as *no undue popularity can render stale, no sham imitation nauseous.*" To these five I would add a sixth, No. 8 in E (given as No. 10 in Peters' edition). As before stated, Schumann raved about the beauty of No. 7 in A, while most English critics



regard No. 4 in A as the gem. Dr. Ernest Walker in appraising these six Nocturnes says that they "are full of singularly refined and limpid music which has very real distinction of manner—distinction, indeed, of a kind that very many little piano pieces by composers far greater on the whole than Field, fail to display." He adds: "Indeed, the seventy or eighty years that centre round 1800 are the nadir of English musical composition; a few things here and there, as we have seen, served to rescue the torch of our art from utter extinction, but still almost all the really finest work owes its quality to more or less close adherence to the great models of the past—*only in the Nocturnes of Field is a modestly new note struck.*" Nor must I omit to mention that the latest *American History of Music* by Tapper and Goetschius (New York, 1915), gives due credit to Field, "one of the most refined and poetical of Chopin's direct predecessors, both in style and spirit," and it avows that "his *Nocturnes* were a direct inspiration to Chopin."

Finally, as to the value of Field's Nocturnes, let us hear the verdict of one of the most distinguished of modern German musicologists, Dr. Hugo Riemann, of Leipzig University, whose *Musiklexikon* has gone through seven

editions :—“ *Field may justly be described as one of the most original pianistic phenomena.*”

To sum up, John Field of Dublin enjoys the triple distinction (1) of having been the Inventor of the *Nocturne* ; (2) of having been an incomparable virtuoso on the pianoforte ; and (3) of having been the teacher and friend of Glinka, the founder of the Russian School of Music. These three distinctions are more than sufficient to ensure for him a place among the immortals in Music. He inherited the musical traditions of the Irish School of Music so lauded by Giraldus Cambrensis, and worthily carried on by Garland, Power, Dowland, Campion, Costello, Purcell, Madin, O'Carolan, Hempson, Mornington, O'Neill, and Moore, and which in more recent times has been honourably represented by Balfe, Wallace, Sullivan, Holmes, Stewart, Herbert, Stanford, Harty, and Hay.



*Of this memoir 450 copies only have been printed from hand-set  
type, since distributed. This is No.....*

*The Booklet was designed by Colm O'Lochlainn, M.A., at the  
house of the Craftworkers, 39 Harcourt Street, Dublin,  
and printed by O'Loughlin, Murphy & Boland, Ltd.  
Upper Dorset Street, Dublin.*







